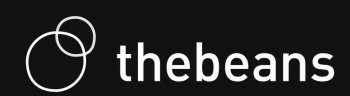


5 STARTUPS BUILDING THE NEXT GREAT FINTECH APP WITH PLAID

THE Scale Up

WITH  PLAID

FEATURING //




At Plaid, we're proud to serve startups.

We've worked with hundreds of founders over the past 10 years, helping them bring to life some of finance's biggest ideas while improving the financial lives of millions of people.

In this ebook, we interviewed five founders to tell the stories behind their startups. We discuss what challenges they wanted to solve in the market, what barriers they had to overcome, and how they're finding ways to scale faster.

For all of the startups featured in this guide, scalability and building trust with customers were two of the most essential components of their growth. They chose Plaid because of:

- our network access to over 12,000 financial institutions
- our trusted brand for account connection
- our user-friendly back- and front-end experience
- our ability to seamlessly connect bank accounts and automate payments



Check out the guide to learn more about how these startups are accelerating growth:

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Cushion

A personal finance app that helps consumers build credit and simplify their bills.

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Wonderschool

A childcare platform that helps providers start their own businesses and makes it easier for parents to find childcare.

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Positive Finance

A certified B Corp impact investing platform that enables employees to save money and donate a portion of their paycheck to nonprofits.

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A buy now, pay later (BNPL) system for B2B businesses that enables them to purchase in installments.

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The Beans

A financial services app that helps employees in caring industries such as healthcare and teaching alleviate financial stress.

We hope you're as excited as we are to see where these startups go.

Redefining BNPL bill pay with Cushion

In 2017, Cushion launched as an AI-powered tool to help consumers negotiate with banks to remove overdraft fees. However, as payments evolved, the Cushion team noticed more customers relying on buy now, pay later (BNPL) loans to purchase everyday expenses—even \$6 hamburgers.

They realized there was a gap in the marketplace and set out to redefine bill pay for the BNPL era.

To build these new solutions, Cushion integrated a suite of Plaid products:

- **Link** for smooth account connectivity
- **Auth** for secure bank account data access
- **Identity Verification** for easy KYC
- **Transfer** for seamless money movement

Today, Cushion is a personal finance app that helps consumers build credit and simplify their bills. It helps people save money by canceling unwanted subscriptions, organize their bills (including BNPL payments) using AI, and improve their credit score while paying their bills.

In this interview, we speak with Paul Kesserwani, Founder and CEO of [Cushion](#), about the company's evolution and how its leveraging Plaid to better serve consumers.



Plaid: Tell us about Cushion and how the idea came about.

Kesserwani: The world of bills has changed dramatically. A decade ago, subscriptions disrupted traditional bill pay. Buy now, pay later (BNPL) has emerged as a new class of recurring obligations.

“Cushion is a consumer bill pay app that offers folks a single place to manage, pay, and build credit with both traditional bills and BNPL payments.”



PAUL KESSERWANI
CEO AND FOUNDER



Back in 2017, we built an AI-powered service that could negotiate with banks to get overdraft fees refunded for consumers. It was a hit, especially during COVID. But as we processed nearly a billion transactions through Plaid, we noticed consumers were struggling to pay not just traditional bills but also a large number of BNPL installments for everyday purchases.

We even saw one user finance a \$6 hamburger with BNPL. That was our wake-up call. BNPL had evolved from financing big-ticket items online to a staple in consumers' lives, financing daily goods like gas, groceries, and takeout; it had become a regular part of people's monthly expenses.

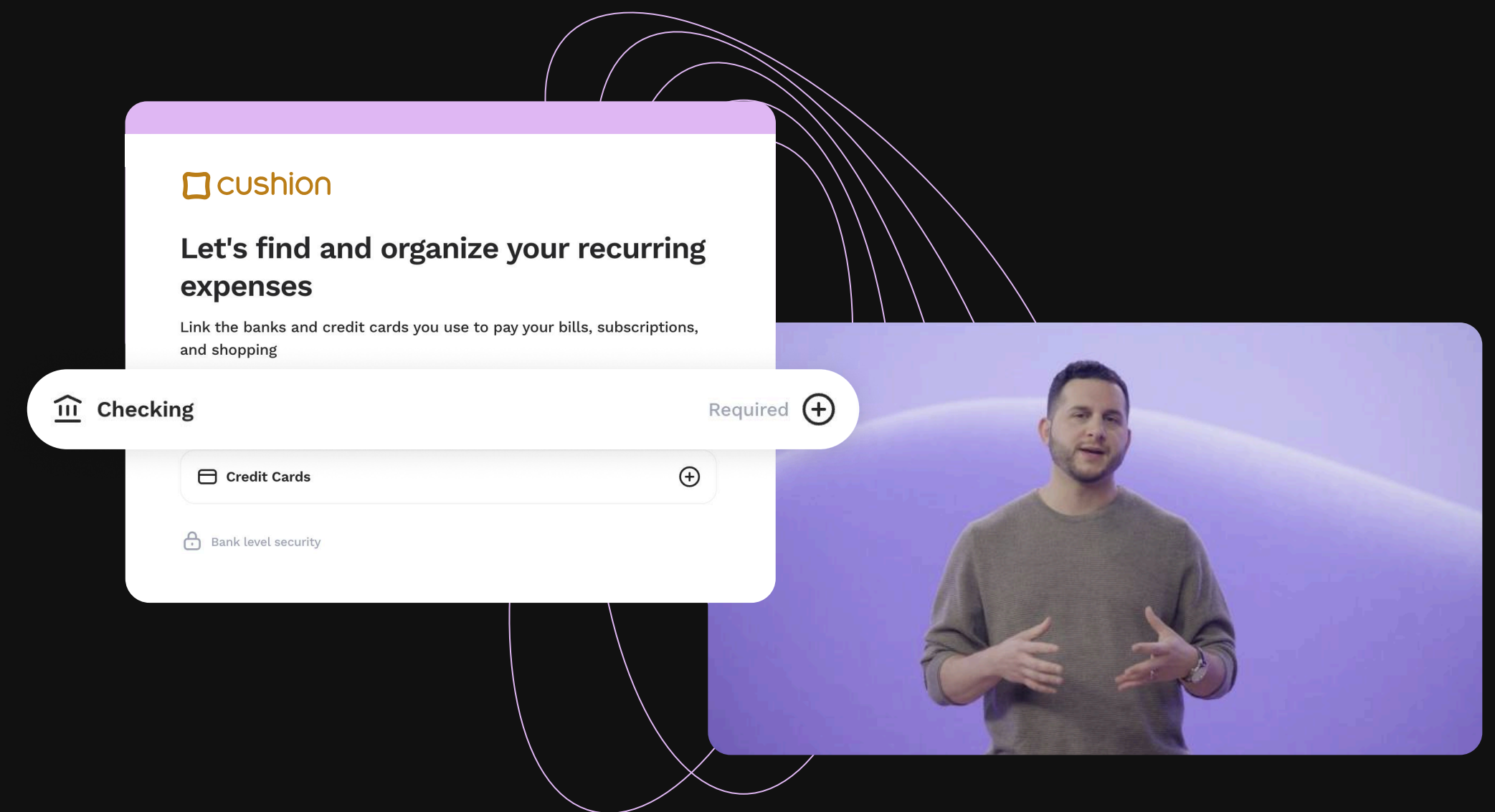
The problem was that existing tools weren't designed to handle this new reality. So, we took a giant leap and pivoted Cushion to redefine bill pay for the BNPL era.

Today, Cushion is a consumer bill pay app that offers folks a single place to manage, pay, and build credit with both traditional bills and BNPL payments.

Plaid: Why did you choose Plaid to help start your business?

Kesserwani: Back in 2017, we needed a solution to help us connect to financial institutions and pull transaction data for our AI-powered bank-fee-negotiating business, and Plaid was the clear leader. But over time, Plaid grew into this multifaceted platform, even acquiring companies like Cognito, which we were using.

We then pivoted into tackling challenges with bills and BNPL, so our relationship with Plaid evolved. We now use Plaid for a whole bunch of things: Link for smooth account connectivity, Auth for secure bank account data access, Identity Verification for easy KYC, and Transfer for seamless money movement.



Plaid doesn't just provide the infrastructure that we leverage and use but also the data, insights, and tooling we need to innovate at the cutting edge of consumer bill pay.

Plaid: Plaid invests heavily in products that drive user growth and also in products that help reduce costs. How do you think about balancing growth and cost?

Kesserwani: Standing up a consumer finance app is expensive, especially one that issues cards and moves money. Historically, we used Plaid to pull somebody's account and routing number, then send that information to another service that could move the money between accounts, but only after we'd KYC'd that customer with yet a different service.

It's a huge win that we can now do all three things with Plaid's suite of APIs designed to work seamlessly together.

Plaid: How has using Plaid promoted a sense of trust and security for your customers?

Kesserwani: In the consumer finance space, Plaid is synonymous with safety. If you ask a consumer to connect their bank to your app, they expect to see the Plaid Link widget.

What's most interesting is that we recently saw this in action. We run ads on Facebook and Instagram, and consumers comment asking questions about security and safety. Other consumers often chime in, saying, "Don't worry. They use Plaid to connect to your bank." It's mind-blowing to see that consumers know the name and brand of the infrastructure powering the app that they want to use.

We're very fortunate to be able to piggyback on and leverage Plaid's brand and the trust it has established with consumers over the past decade.

[Watch the full interview with Cushion →](#)



Making childcare payments easier with Wonderschool

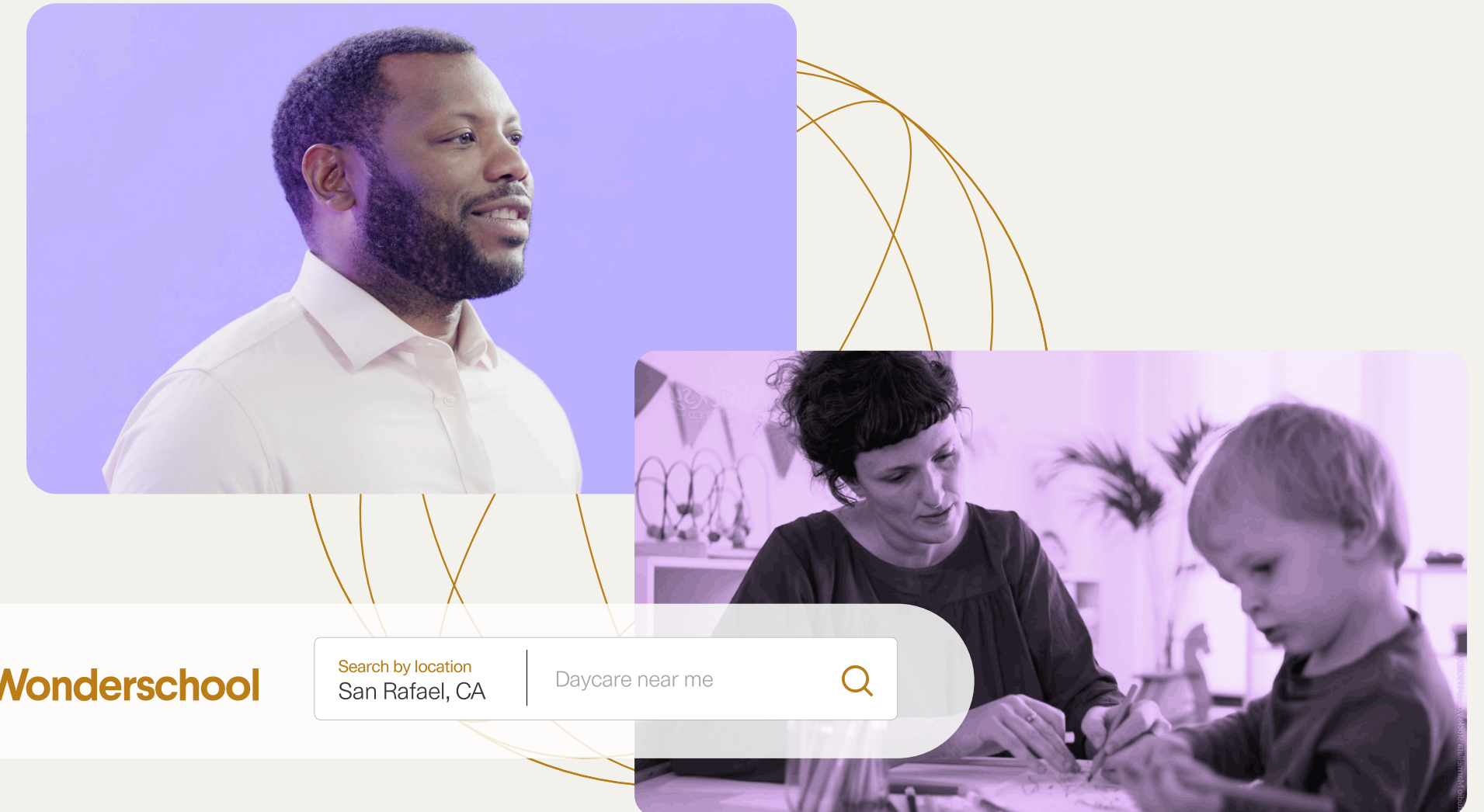
Wonderschool helps families gain access to much-needed early childhood care. Chosen as one of the 100 most influential companies of 2022 by Time Magazine and funded by Andreessen Horowitz (a16z), the platform empowers childcare providers by giving them the tools they need to run an in-home business.

When they started, checks were still the standard for payments, which created additional overhead for parents and providers. To solve this, Wonderschool partnered with Plaid to help providers automate payments and payment processing. Now, users can connect bank accounts on the Wonderschool app, enabling seamless ACH payments that are easy for providers to send and receive.

“Our mission is to ensure that all children have access to childcare within five minutes of their home.”



CHRIS BENNETT
CEO AND FOUNDER



In this interview, we speak with Chris Bennett, Founder and CEO of [Wonderschool](#), about his journey with Wonderschool and how Plaid makes it easier for childcare providers to run their businesses.

Plaid: Tell us about Wonderschool and how the idea came about.

Bennett: Wonderschool is a childcare solutions platform that helps people start, operate, and grow their childcare programs. A provider comes to us with an idea, and we help them get their program up and running by helping them set up their home and figure out their marketing. Once they're ready, we make it easy for parents to find that program through our marketplace.

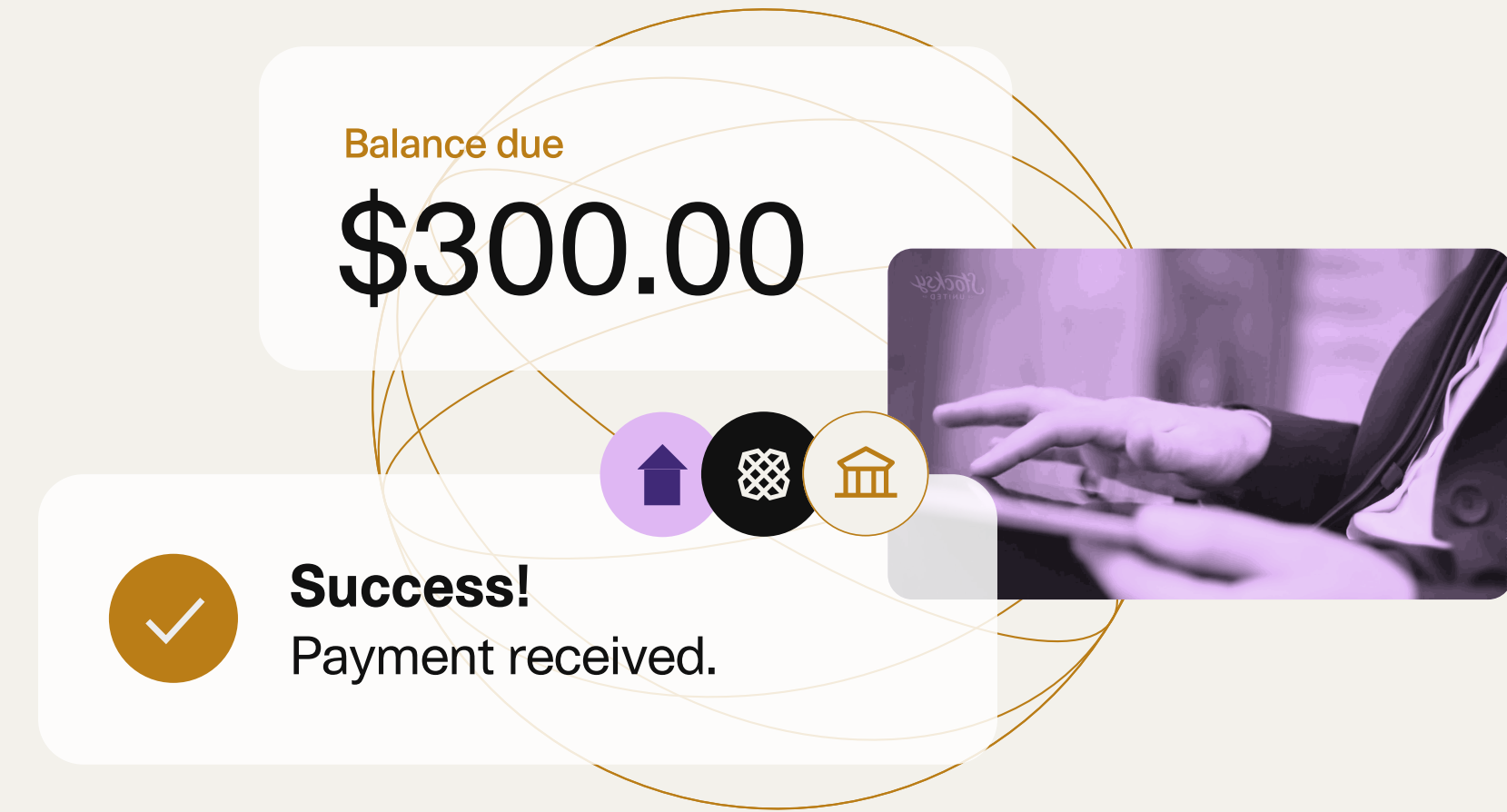
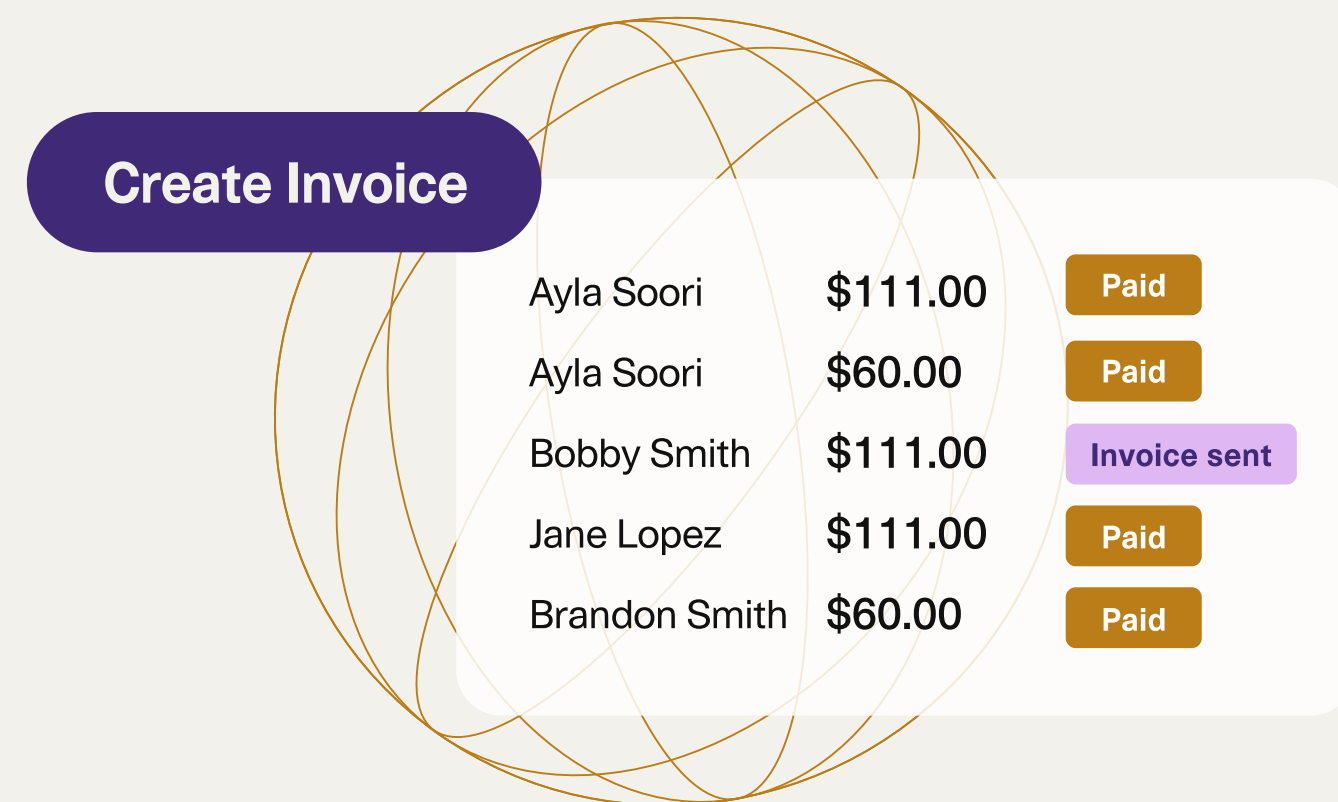
Parents can schedule tours, go to events, and enroll their kids through the Wonderschool platform. Once they're enrolled, they're able to pay and communicate with their provider through the platform. Our mission is to ensure that all children have access to childcare within five minutes of their home.

Plaid: What was that 'aha moment' where you realized this is what was needed, and that you were the person to do it?

Bennett: I started Wonderschool because I kept hearing from friends that they couldn't find childcare in San Francisco. I did research and found that it's a problem all over the country and the world. So, I started a couple of childcare programs myself to learn everything about running a program. Then, I realized that there was an opportunity to build a tech platform that enabled people to start and grow programs.

The 'aha moment' happened when I pulled a list of all the childcare programs in San Francisco from the phonebook. I started calling them and asking if they were open to having me support their business. One provider said 'sure,' and I drove over to Noe Valley from the Lower Haight to visit.

Based on the website, I thought this program wasn't going to be great, but I was shocked. I met these incredible former elementary school teachers who started their own childcare business. They needed help that I could provide with my business background.



Plaid: That's amazing. What did you do before you did this?

Bennett: I've been an entrepreneur most of my life. I started an EdTech company during undergrad and started some companies in high school. Before Wonderschool, I started a company that helped individuals sell products on social media.

Plaid: Why did you choose Plaid to help you start your business?

Bennett: Plaid was an obvious choice. We read about Plaid on TechCrunch and thought it was an incredible product. We realized we needed something to enable ACH payments for parents and make it easy for providers to receive payments. So, we decided to partner with Plaid, and I've been a happy customer for a long time.



Plaid: Tell us about one of your favorite customer stories and why it inspires you.

Bennett: I have a lot, but I'd say my favorite is a provider named Gloria who was working in a childcare program when we first met her. She was inspired to start her own program after seeing other people starting Wonderschools. We helped her start a program out of her home, which quickly filled up. She ended up moving from a small townhouse to a larger one and then to the home she now lives in and operates her program from.

It was incredible to see her grow into a successful entrepreneur with a large staff serving close to a hundred children in San Francisco—it was very inspiring.

[Watch the full interview with Wonderschool →](#)



Streamlining impact finance with Positive Finance

Positive Finance is an impact finance platform that enables employees to save more money and donate a portion of their paycheck to nonprofits. As a Certified B Corp, Positive Finance is dedicated to making a difference in the climate and environment and wants to enable people to take action.

To connect people's bank accounts and payroll providers to charitable causes, Positive Finance needed a partner who could help them access thousands of financial institutions across the US. They also needed to understand their customers' financial outlook, cash flow, and fraud risk. For all of that, they turned to Plaid.

“We need to look at more than profits and return on investments. We also need to consider people and the planet because they go hand in hand.”



FABIEN LAMAISON
CEO AND FOUNDER



In this interview, we speak with Fabien Lamaison, Co-Founder and CEO of [Positive Finance](#), about how the company enables people to make an impact through their paychecks.

Plaid: Tell us about Positive Finance and how that idea came to be.

Lamaison: Positive Finance is an impact finance platform for businesses and their employees. We help businesses achieve sustainability goals and boost employee retention. With our app, employees can save and donate. In the future, they will be able to invest in social and climate impact funds.

We want to democratize philanthropy and impact savings and donations in the workplace.

Plaid: That sounds amazing. What inspired the founding of your company, and what mission drives your business today?

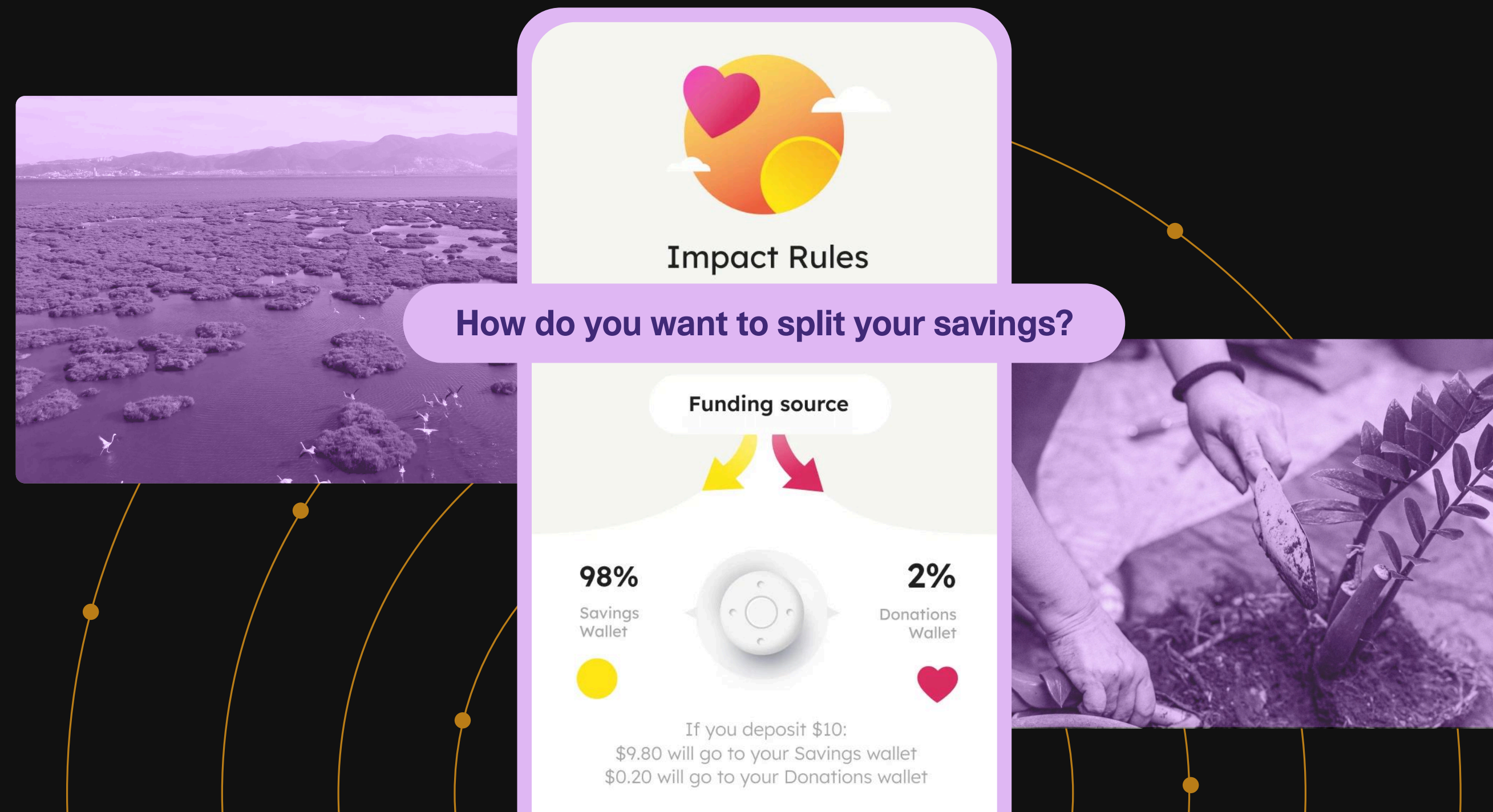
Lamaison: What inspired me to create a company is that I sometimes hear that impact investments or donations are risky. We don't really know what the impact is. But when you think about it, it's actually the opposite.

Not doing anything is riskier because climate change is a reality. If the planet is dying, populations are displaced because of disasters, so not doing anything is dangerous. We need to look at more than profits and return on investments. We also need to consider people and the planet because they go hand in hand.

Plaid: Why did you choose Plaid to help start your business?

Lamaison: We chose Plaid because of its coverage of US financial institutions. This coverage is critical for our work because we want people to easily connect their funding sources to our app.

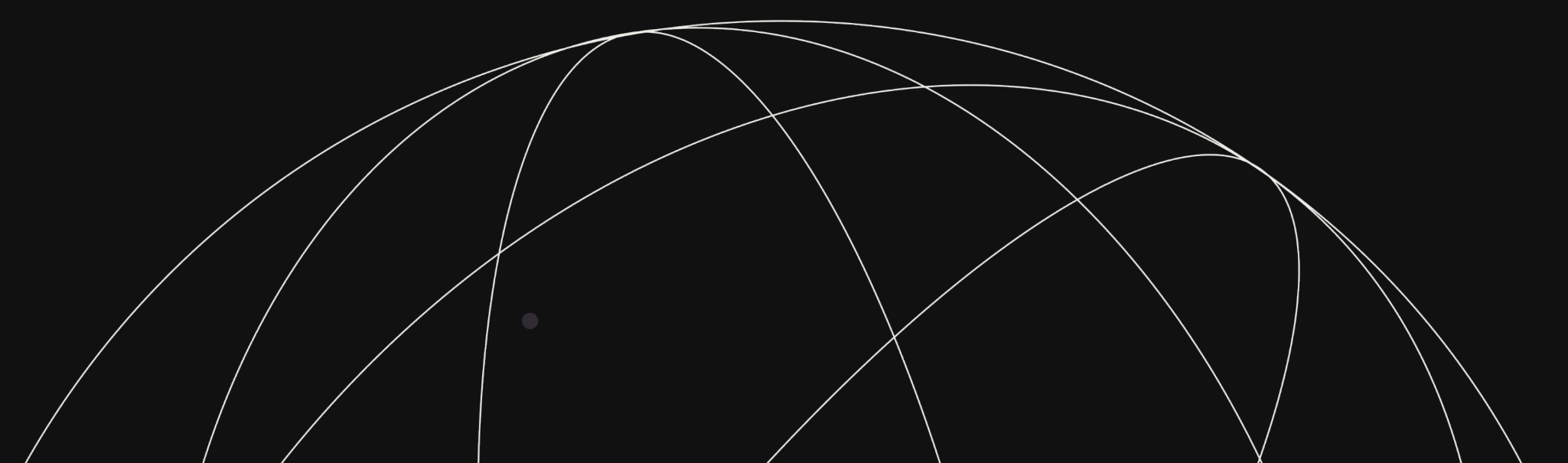
We need to be able to help people allocate a portion of their payroll so that they can make an impact. Plaid's ease of use was critical for what we wanted to do. During onboarding, we worked with the Plaid team and gathered many business and tech insights, which made it super easy. Also, because we are a B Corp, they connected us to the impact team at Plaid, and we really appreciated the alignment on the mission.



Plaid: How do you see your business growing in the next five years? How can Plaid support that growth?

Lamaison: In the next five years, we want to open in new geographies worldwide, and there is no better partner than Plaid to do that efficiently. We also want to leverage more data and intelligence to do customer matchmaking so that they can discover causes to support. We'd like to automate giving and impact investing and bring causes to our customers based on their preferences and lifestyles. Plaid's products, like Transactions, can help us do that and much more.

[Watch the full interview with Positive Finance →](#)



Building BNPL for B2B payments with Slope

Slope is a buy now, pay later (BNPL) system for B2B businesses, allowing them to pay in installments at checkout.

Slope was co-founded by two second-time founders, Alice Deng and Lawrence Lin Murata, who met at a rival hackathon between the University of California, Berkeley, and Stanford in 2016. Slope's mission to transform how businesses accept payments and offer more flexible financing has attracted high-profile investors. Its founders believe BNPL is the foundation for rebuilding the messy cross-border B2B payments infrastructure.

“Slope is a B2B payments company that helps wholesalers digitize their B2B business. Our mission is to help digitize the \$125 trillion B2B economy.”



LAWRENCE LIN MURATA
CEO AND CO-FOUNDER, SLOPE



In this interview, we speak with Lawrence Lin Murata, Co-Founder and CEO, about Slope's origins, how Plaid's reliable bank data was essential for their business model, and how they use that data to build AI risk models.

Plaid: Tell us about Slope and how the idea came about.

Lin Murata: Slope is a B2B payments company that helps wholesalers digitize their B2B business. Our mission is to help digitize the \$125 trillion B2B economy.

I grew up in Brazil. My parents run a wholesale business selling toys to other companies. During school breaks, I always helped my parents. Everything was offline and based on in-person trust.



During COVID, my parents' business and many others were forced to shut down and go online. I also saw the rise of consumer ecommerce and how it became easy for consumers to make purchases online with one click.

That inspired us to create a consumer-grade experience that helps B2B businesses come online.

Plaid: Why did you choose Plaid to help start your business?

Lin Murata: Plaid is an industry standard for collecting open banking data that our customers trust. It has enabled us to create beautiful experiences that allow our customers to quickly connect their bank accounts and for us to analyze banking data.

Slope is a payments company, and any payments company cares about fraud and risk. The bank transaction data that Plaid provides is the lifeblood of our business. These transactions have two critical properties.

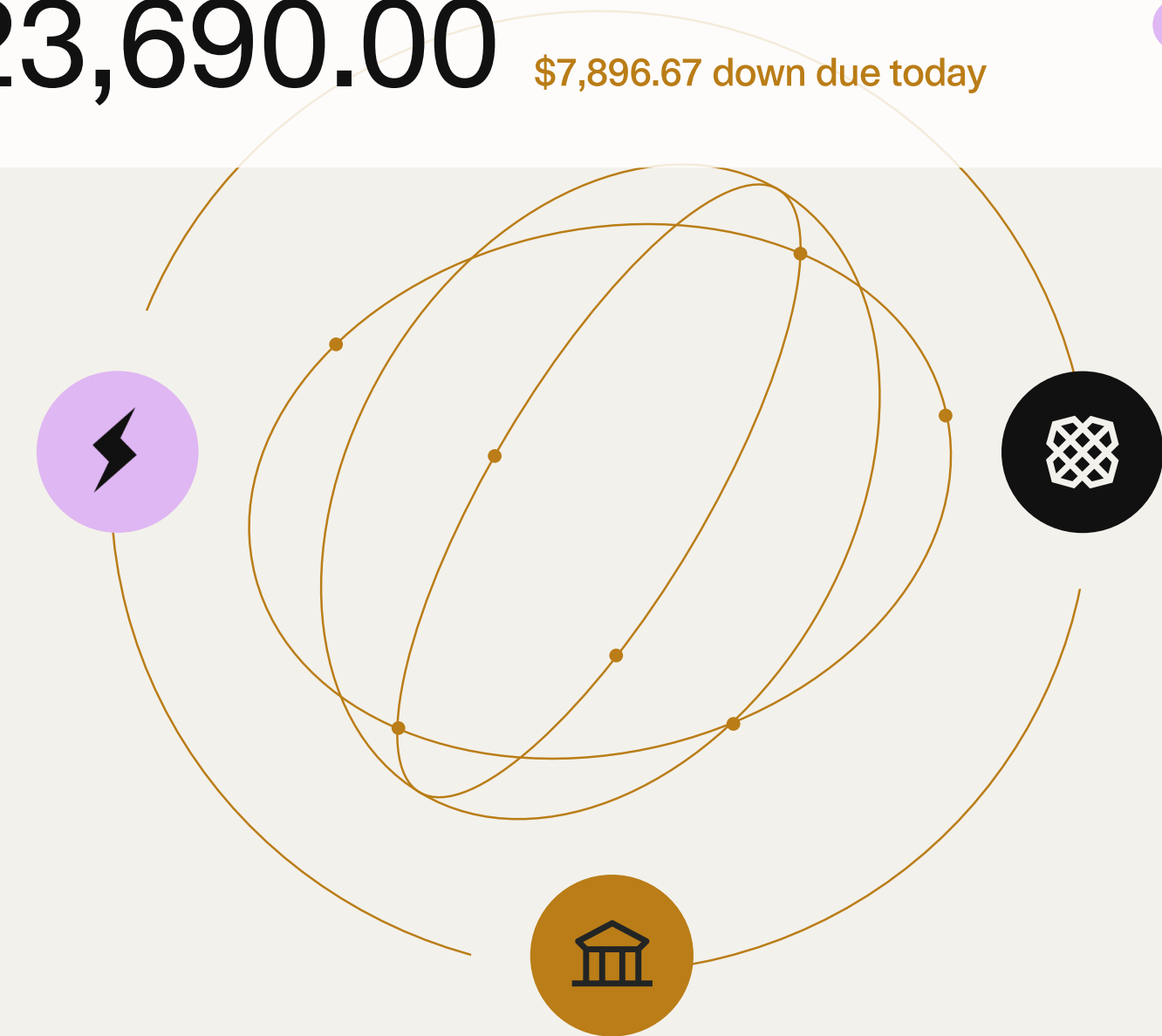
- 1 They're real-time. We can see any cash that's coming in and out, giving us a real-time view of what's happening in the business.
- 2 They're unfalsifiable. Plaid is pulling directly from banks, so we're able to get truthful information. We've actually built all of our AI large language risk models on top of data from Plaid.

Plaid: How has using Plaid promoted a sense of trust and security for your customers?

Lin Murata: Plaid gives us a reliable and trustworthy way for our business customers to connect to their bank accounts.

✓ Pay in installments 2 months 3 months

\$23,690.00 \$7,896.67 down due today 3% interest



It's easy and happens in real time. It's enabled us to have a five-minute application experience, and our decisioning is instant. In the offline world, that usually takes weeks with many back-and-forth interactions, sometimes in person.

With Plaid, we can quickly analyze data, assess risk, and create a smooth customer experience.



Plaid: Last question, how did you come up with the name 'Slope'?

Lin Murata: One of our investors says you should always hire for slope instead of y-intercept. Slope refers to the growth rate of a curve, and y-intercept refers to job experience. That is reflected in our backgrounds as founders.

We both came from unusual backgrounds. Being from Brazil, my parents knew nothing about the tech world. When I went to Stanford, it was a distant reality from where I grew up. For me, Slope really represents the idea of always improving and always learning. It's all about growth.

[Watch the full interview with Slope →](#)



Alleviating financial stress for employees with **The Beans**

The Beans is a financial services company that helps employees in caring industries, such as healthcare and education, manage their finances and achieve financial balance. Through a personal finance app, it uses visual aids to help users simplify their path to financial success.

“I saw financial stress as a first principles problem, the thing really getting in the way. It’s also a public health emergency and the number one cause of stress in America.”



MELISSA PANCOAST
CEO AND CO-FOUNDER, THE BEANS

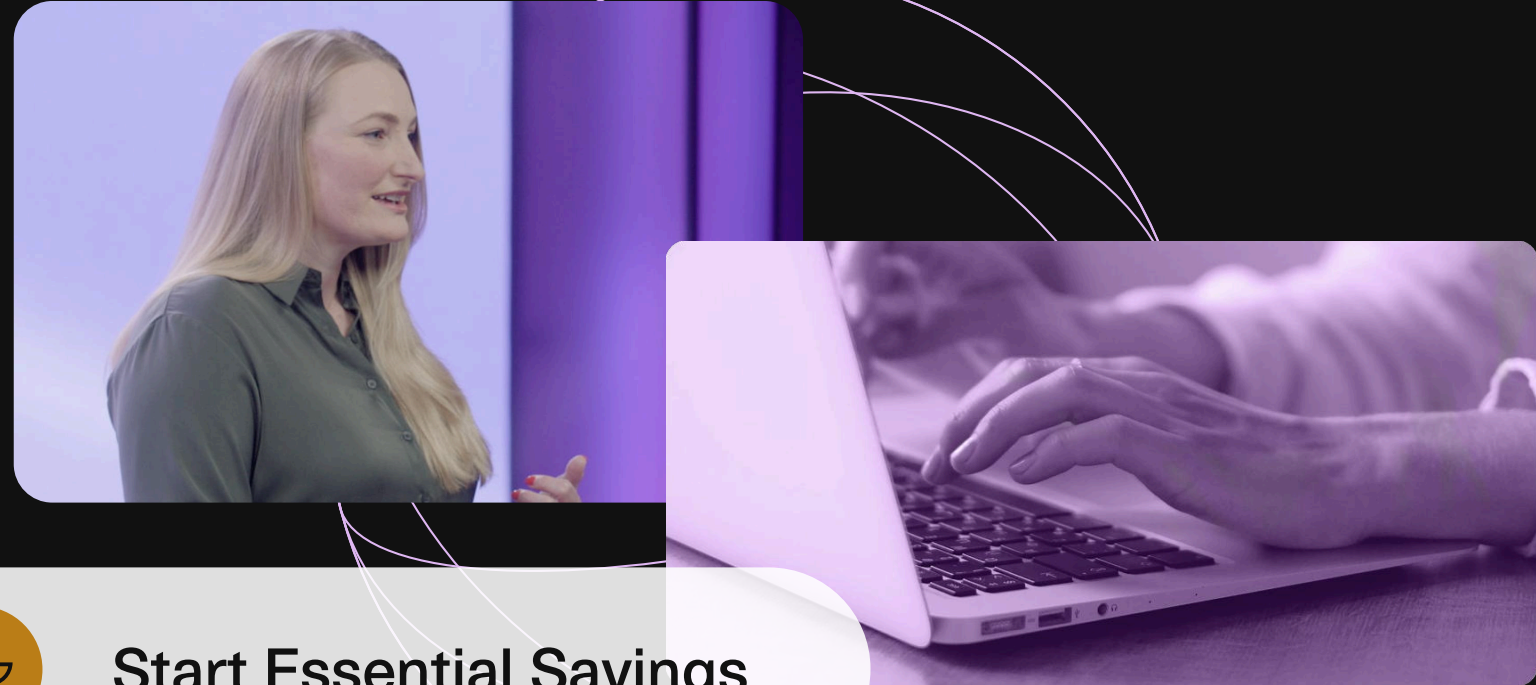


The Beans offers services like professional development, automated cash flow and savings plans, and community support. It was designed to help alleviate employees' number one stressor: money.

In this interview, we speak with Melissa Pancoast, Co-Founder and CEO of [The Beans](#), about what drove her to help people reduce their financial stress and how Plaid helps her achieve that mission.

Plaid: Tell us about The Beans and how the idea came about.

Pancoast: At the Beans, we help reduce employee turnover in the caring professions by solving the number one source of employee stress—their finances.



Start Essential Savings

I taught 1st and 5th grade in New York City and dealt with financial stress myself. I then went back to school and studied financial stress because I saw the pressure it put on my colleagues and the families we were working with.

At Oxford, I developed Proven, the first program with pharmaceutical-grade evidence on how to reduce financial stress. Then, I moved to the Bay Area to figure out how to build a software company so we could cost-effectively scale that program.

Plaid: Tell me more about the leap from teaching to where you are now. What was your ‘aha moment’?

Pancoast: I saw financial stress as a first principles problem, the thing really getting in the way. It’s also a public health emergency and the number one cause of stress in America.

Plaid: What are some of the services that The Beans offers its customers?

Pancoast: Everything we build is based on three principles: money, life, and balance.

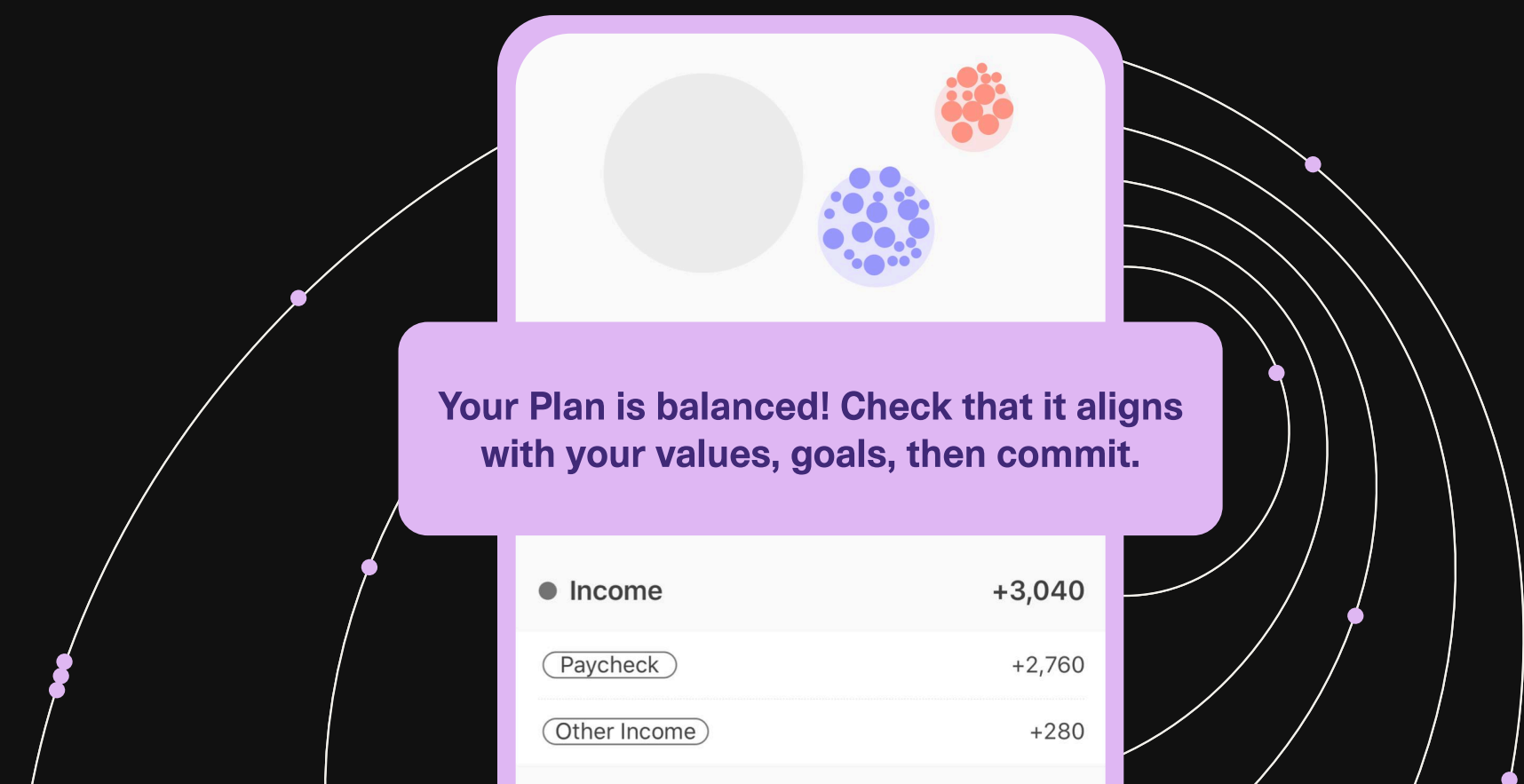
These are the three things that have been proven with rock-solid evidence to promote financial progress and reduce financial stress. They are to have a plan, build savings, and spend in alignment with values.

We use Plaid to bring in data to make the world’s first automated cash flow plan. The platform connects to your account, analyzes your historical earning and spending trends, and builds a personalized cash flow plan that automatically updates. From here we move to the second principle, which is to build savings.

We recommend what you can save based on your earnings, spending, and debt burden—all things that Plaid provides to us so we can have that visibility. We tell you what you can save per paycheck and offer to move that money to your savings account for you.

Plaid: Amazing. So why the name, The Beans?

Pancoast: We’re named The Beans because the work that I led at Oxford and in Southern Africa used dried beans and corn to make visual financial maps for people. The name reminds us of our roots in that space and keeps us honest about where we came from. Plus, it’s fun. People like it.



Plaid: Why did you choose Plaid to help you start your business?

Pancoast: I chose Plaid in 2015 because it was really easy to get started. Back then, it was me and a friend who was a software engineer working nights and weekends. We were experimenting in the sandbox, and it was remarkably simple. Since then, Plaid's been an incredible partner every step of the way.

Plaid: Do you have a favorite customer story you can share with us?

Pancoast: One of my favorite stories is about a teacher in Atlanta. Her name is Zinzi, and she found The Beans through her employer. She made her first financial plan and realized that the way she was living her day-to-day life didn't match up with that plan. She got out of bankruptcy two years early and says that it's because she made a plan with The Beans.

[Watch the full interview with The Beans →](#)



These interviews were filmed for Plaid Effects 2024 live event. They have been edited for clarity and length. You can watch them on-demand, along with other content about Plaid's new solutions, enterprise customer interviews, and more.

[Watch on demand →](#)



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